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Committee considers Sen. Stamas' legislation to protect children from sexual predators

LANSING – Testimony was heard today in the Senate Committee on Judiciary on legislation designed to give judges and law enforcement officials a powerful new weapon to protect children from sexual predators, said Sen. Tony Stamas, R-Midland.

“We need to send a clear message to sexual predators – should you choose to prey on Michigan’s children, you will not have the opportunity to do it again,” Stamas said. “The most serious crimes deserve the most severe punishments.”

Sponsored by Stamas, the legislation will give prosecutors the ability to charge and judges the option of sentencing individuals convicted of sex with children to life in prison with no chance of parole.

If signed into law, Senate Bill 709, along with two companion bills, will make it possible for an individual convicted of criminal sexual conduct in the first degree to serve a life sentence without a chance of parole if their victim was under the age of 13.

Stamas’ proposal also requires one of the following circumstances be present: infliction of injury, use of a weapon, force or coercion, or the perpetrator held a position of authority.

“I appreciate the opportunity to be heard on this important matter,” said Alpena County Prosecutor Dennis Grenkowicz, who traveled to Lansing to testify in support of SB 709. “When dealing with crimes like these there are exploiters and predators. Exploiters take advantage of opportunities while predators make opportunities. At some point the ugly cycle of sexual abuse has to be broken. In order to do that, we must take these predators out of circulation. This legislation will help us reach that goal.”

Midland County Sheriff Jerry Nielsen also testified in support of the Stamas plan.

“The bill that Senator Stamas is sponsoring is extremely important to me and law enforcement officials across Michigan,” Nielsen said. “My experience is that when you

have a child under the age of 13 and they become a victim of a sexual crime they have to go to court and testify in front of a jury and it's painful for them to have to relive the experience all over again.

"I think of my grandchildren," Nielsen continued. "I want to help make them and all Michigan children safer from these types of sexual predators. This legislation is an excellent opportunity to eliminate some recidivism."

The Michigan's Sheriff Association supports the legislation.

"The Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence appreciates Senator Stamas' leadership and commitment to better protect children from sexual abusers," said Kathy Hagenian, MCADSV executive policy director. "When I have the opportunity to testify I will be focusing on reasons from the victim's perspective of why more severe penalties are necessary."

Sen. Alan Cropsey, R- DeWitt, chair of the committee, indicated he hopes to report SB 709 in the upcoming weeks.

"Sexual predators preying on children should not be released from prison so that they can continue a pattern of abuse," Stamas said. "Crimes against children should carry severe punishments that keep the convicted offenders off the streets."

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Editor's note: A photo of Sen. Stamas and Midland County Sheriff Jerry Nielsen and Alpena County Prosecutor Dennis Grenkowicz testifying before the Senate Committee on Judiciary is available on the Michigan Senate Republican Majority photowire at: <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/photowire/Stamas/Stamas.htm>.